

# FINE DINING

Ting Dalton discovers a complex mix of sublime flavours and textures at Sorrel in Dorking...



"We're the first ones here," my mum whispers as we're led through to a table with a view of the bright open kitchen and of chef Steve Drake, busily preparing for the night ahead. We both sink into the luxurious velvet corner sofas and admire our surroundings in the tastefully refurbished 300-year old building with original wooden beams, floors and understated but elegantly designed interiors - sophisticated and comfortable with touches of brilliance such as the embossed folded menus and pristine glassware, we feel settled for the evening ahead.

As the deliciously dry house Champagne is poured, the restaurant is suddenly full and we're already tucking into the delightful amuse-bouches - compressed cucumber; delicate and refreshing, melt-in-the-mouth duck parfait and raw mackerel (a nemesis of mine since I fell pregnant) but distinctly unfishy, wrapped

in crispy buttery filo pastry. We polish it off in no time and decide that the nine course tasting menu is the way to go.

I like to think I'm adventurous, however, I do tend to go for the same types of dishes when I'm eating out, so rather than over-analysing the menu, I relax and go with the flow. I've never been a fan of sweet and savoury - tending to avoid these combinations. Since dining at Sorrel, Steve Drake has turned that notion on its head. I've realised that it's all about the equilibrium - balancing flavours with different textures that together produce a complex fusion that is not only exquisite but delightful to eat.

Highlights from our nine courses which were accompanied by a moreish white Rueda, include a juicy scallop cooked to perfection with curried granola and fresh cucumber

ketchup; a roasted broccoli adding crunch to a creamy curd and green strawberry; and lamb belly served with a standout rosemary sherry sauce and miso aubergine, which was deceptively punchy and meaty, too. A raspberry Spidachio with lemon meringue crisps finished the meal perfectly, as did the glass of rosé Champagne. Mum and I were bereft our Sorrel experience was drawing to a close.

While some fine dining restaurants are stifling - all hushed tones and pomp, Sorrel's clientele are chatty - there's merriment, laughter and plenty of delighted smiles. It was a tantalising and polished meal that impressed at every stage. And it's not surprising that Steve has just been awarded his second Michelin star. Mum was so blown away, she's already made a reservation to return. Just not with me, unfortunately...

■ [www.sorrelrestaurant.co.uk](http://www.sorrelrestaurant.co.uk)

## THE EPSOM SUPPER CLUB

It's not every day that you dress up to go out and eat in a stranger's home. Run by private chef Laura Scott, The Epsom Supper Club has been bringing together people from all over to share their love of good food. At a cost of £35 a head, and the option to BYO, guests are treated to four courses as well as interesting conversation.

My friend Emma and I were a little apprehensive knocking on the front door, both being Supper Club first-timers. But after being welcomed into Laura's beautiful home and given a cocktail, we were soon put at ease and began chatting to the other 10 guests. Laura has recently renovated her kitchen and dining area, and it shows. Tastefully decorated in dark tones and colourful artwork, there is a sense of restaurant chic, rather than a homely vibe. Laura herself is the consummate professional, calm and unfazed.

After being seated, we were served homemade sourdough bread - so good I ended up eating three pieces. The deep red beetroot soup delicately flavoured with orange was tasty. Our main of roasted duck, red wine jus, garlic mash and fried spring greens was excellent, and all plates were polished clean. Dessert consisted of a burnt cheesecake and pumpkin pie ice-cream, not too sweet but warming with hints of cinnamon. It was Laura's homemade rum truffles that finished me off - I couldn't eat anymore.

Restaurant quality food and a chance to meet new people certainly made a pleasant change to an evening in front of the telly. And Laura also hosts private events, so this is a great alternative for a dinner party, too.

■ [www.howtocookgoodfood.co.uk](http://www.howtocookgoodfood.co.uk)

